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## OVERWORKED CHILDREN ON THE FARM AND IN THE SCHOOL

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Child labor is as old as civilization. Indeed, in all but name, it is far older than civilization for the child of the savage has to forage for himself and fight for his own food from the time he is able to crawl. In savagery, the child works for himself; in barbarism, for his parents; in civilization, for a factory. He simply changes taskmasters with the ages, and the sternest and most cruel of all was the first. More children die of starvation, disease and neglect in the healthiest tribe of "noble savages" that now exists, than in the vilest slum of our factory towns under civilization. There is abundant ground for being ashamed of ourselves, little or none for discouragement or fear that the stamina of the race is being undermined, or its continued existence threatened by child labor. The race is *not* deteriorating, even the child of the factory slums is one and one-half inches taller and seven pounds heavier than he was thirty years ago. So far as data are available, it seems almost certain that there never was, in any previous age of the world, as little harmful child labor as in the present one. The magnificent and beneficent series of laws and regulations forbidding harmful child labor which have been placed upon the statute books of all civilized countries and states, largely by the activities of such societies as this, are simply a living demonstration of an awakened public conscience upon this subject, which did not exist before. The evil was present in abundance, but so diffused as to make no pointed appeal to public sentiment, and so universal that it was accepted as a matter of course.

It is gravely to be doubted whether the invention of machinery and consequent development of the factory system, making the labor of children more valuable, since brute strength was no longer required, upon the whole increased either the amount or the harmfulness of child labor. It simply concentrated, and, so

to speak, advertised its evil consequences; just as the poverty, malnutrition, dirt and disease of a hundred thousand peasants and agricultural laborers, when scattered out over a whole countryside or province, escape our observation, but horrify us when they are concentrated into four or five acres of a city slum. When children are overworked by the score and by the hundred in factories, in full view of the public, so that streams of their pale faces and stunted forms may be seen pouring out upon the open street, it is only a question of time when the public conscience will be awakened and the shame forbidden by law. So marked has been this effect that although there is yet abundant room for improvement, taking the civilized world as a whole, the child in the factory, shop, mine and mill, is now carefully and fairly efficiently protected by wise, thoughtful and humane laws, leaving as the only unprotected classes, the children upon the farm and in the school. To what extent they need protection, not by law, but by the education of public sentiment, is the problem of this paper.

This Committee has been so gratifyingly successful in its efforts for legislative reform, that I believe the time has come for it to turn its attention in this direction as well. The relative magnitude of the problem is easily indicated by a few rough figures. According to the last United States census, there were, of children under sixteen years of age in the United States, 650,000 employed in gainful occupations in factory, shop, mill, etc.; 1,100,000 working for wages upon farms; and roughly, 15,000,000 in schools. It is easily seen where the greatest possible menace to the future of the race might fall. If only one per cent of the children in schools were overworked or overconfined; if only five per cent. of the children employed upon farms, including those working at home were so injured, it would work more injury to the nation than if twenty per cent. of those employed in shops and factories were overworked. Or to put it differently: If all the children employed in shops, factories and mines were injuriously overworked, that would only be the equivalent of the damage done if ten per cent. of the children upon our farms, and five per cent. of those in our schools were overworked or overconfined.

That overworking and underfeeding of children upon the farm and overworking and overconfining of children in the school

exist, and in no insignificant numbers, few of experience will deny. Most of us who are born or have lived in the country will have little hesitation in testifying that at least ten and probably nearly twenty per cent. of children upon farms are overworked and underfed, from land hunger, traditional ideas of economy, Puritanic notions about discipline and "hardening" and "bearing the yoke in one's youth," or from sheer ignorance and indifference. While there are many admirable and wholesome features about life on a farm, so that it is probably, all things considered, the most wholesome and desirable place for children to grow up, it has also its defects.

Those of us who happen to have been born or raised upon a farm, a *real* farm, run to earn a living and not as a healthful and very expensive amusement, can promptly and feelingly testify that it is not half so rose-colored as it is usually pictured in literature or through the pearly mists of our boyhood memories. Farmwork is the hardest and most disagreeable work there is, with the longest hours and the poorest pay. Much of it has to be done before daylight or after dark in mud, in snow, in storm and slush. Farm bedrooms are cold and badly ventilated, and the sheer discomfort, verging at times upon agony, of getting out of bed on a winter's morning and starting the fire with damp wood in a kitchen that feels like a cold storage plant in January, and then going out to thaw the pump, shovel a path to the barn, feed the shivering, staring, coated horses, and milk half a dozen frost-rimed cows, is still fresh in our memories. These and a score of similarly cheerful and agreeable memories rise before us like a nightmare. It makes little difference where we may have gone, or what our lot in life, we never have had to do anything so disagreeable or abominable since. Moreover, while there is an abundance of food growing upon the farm, that food is raised for sale and wherever the balance is a narrow one between the income and expenditure, as it is in most of farmer's families, the bulk and the best of that food that will bring a good price in the market is and must be sold, leaving only the poorer quality for home use. In short, the farmer who farms for a living, or who expects to make money, must in the terse language of the corner grocery, "do all his own work, and live on what he can't sell."

This stern necessity reacts upon the children of the farm just as it does upon those of the factory town, and the physician in country practice can show you in the remotest and most peaceful country district as severe cases of malnutrition, of rickets, of anaemia, of diseases of the joints and the spine, and of stunted development, as you can find in a city hospital. There will not be so many of them, but they will be there nevertheless, except in unusually prosperous and well-to-do neighborhoods. In the aggregate, I think it would be safe to say that they equal, if they do not far exceed, the defectives and the degenerates of our much smaller slum population. Unquestionably, a large majority of the work done by children upon the farm, being for the most part in the open air, and under the care and protection of their own parents or relatives, is not only not harmful but decidedly beneficial; but we must not shut our eyes to the fact that young children and boys and girls are overworked upon farms, badly fed, and deprived of proper amusement and social and intellectual opportunities to a most undesirable degree, and that this is one of the most potent reasons for the oft-deplored exodus from the farm to the city. When it comes to overworking and underfeeding his children, making home hateful and life one joyless, monotonous grind, a certain class of farmers has no right to throw stones at any factory operative, miner or even sweat-shop worker. If President Roosevelt's commission on country life will succeed in reforming or even improving this type of man—you all know him, whose barn is four times as big as his house, and his *real* pets and prides his horses and pigs—it will do as much good as any factory legislation that can be placed upon the statute books.

Bad as the hours and conditions under which the children in the much-berated cotton mills of our Southern states live and work, it is a question in the minds of competent physicians who have visited the neighborhoods, whether, in many instances, the children are not better off in point of food, education, recreation and opportunities for development, than they are, upon the small, barren, poverty-stricken farms of the average "cracker" or "poor white" of those states. By all means let us insist upon the strictest regulations to protect the health, the welfare and morals of the children in those mills, or let us remember that we are not restoring them to a perfect hygienic paradise if we send them back to the farms.

The same thing must be borne in mind in regard to the other great alternative to child labor, the place to which the child must be sent if he be taken out of the factory—the school. As things stand at present, it is my unwilling judgment that while the factory may become a sweat shop, the average school in the United States to-day is little better than a mental treadmill for the average boy of the working classes after twelve years of age; that the education is so purely formal, so bookish, so ladylike, so irrational and impractical in a word, that it stunts his mind, bewilders his senses and fills him with a dislike for real education and training, which warps him mentally as badly as the factory does physically. Many a boy of this class and age, as our antiquated curriculum stands at present, is better off working six hours a day, in a well-ventilated, thoroughly sanitary workshop, conducted on kindly and intelligent principles, than he would be in the schoolroom droning and day-dreaming over classical absurdities, in which he can find no interest nor profit. The motto of the school is "By books ye are saved." But it is a case of "the letter that killeth." In the total, the school is doing more physical damage to our children than the factory.

What the boy wants is not books but *life*, not words but *things*, and as matters are arranged at present, he has to leave the schoolroom and go into the factory or the shop to get them. The average schoolroom is preferable to the shop or factory for the working boy or girl after the thirteenth year, in but little more than the fact that it protects him from physical overstrain and its deadening six-hour confinement at hard and uninteresting tasks, which is a heavy offset to this.

Not only so, but this utter lack of appeal of the public school curriculum to the working boy of thirteen or more is one of *the principal causes of the rush of child labor into the shop and the factory*. Taking it the world over, the principal cause of harmful child labor is poverty; the stern need of even the pittance that can be earned by the child to enable the rest of the family to live, not unmixed with greed on the part of a certain class of parents, eager to recoup themselves for the expense and trouble of rearing a large family. In European countries the value of the child's earnings to the parents is the principal motive for early work. In this country, however, we are more fortunately situated.

Wages are higher, so that the father's income is more often or more nearly adequate to support the entire family, and the average of intelligence and humanity in the parents of the working class is much higher so that they can see the advantage of giving their children the best possible start in life.

Statistical investigations of this point appear to have been made only upon a very limited scale. But so far as they have gone they bring out the interesting fact that from fifty to seventy per cent. of the child labor at too early years is due to the initiative *not* of the parent but *of the child*. The causes alleged by the children for their choice were most suggestive; while many of them simply wanted to earn money, to have more to spend, to get on in the world, to buy better clothes or went just because their friends and comrades did, the largest single group gave it as their reason that they were tired of school, that they could not get on at school, that they could not understand their studies or even, *horibile dictu*, that they got sick at school—they seem to stand confinement of the shop better than that of the schoolroom. In many of these cases, the parents were not only perfectly willing for their children to continue at school, but were paying out money for instruction in bookkeeping, shorthand, music, drawing, etc., in addition to letting the children keep their wages. In short, the conclusion, strange as it may seem to many, is almost inevitable that if we rationalize and modernize the curriculum of our public schools, we should cut the foundation from under one-half if not two-thirds of the child-labor tendency. In fine, as our most intelligent teachers, our most thoughtful students of pedagogy, our physicians, our sanitarians, our child-labor students, have united for years in declaring the most vital, the most crying demand before the American Commonwealth to-day is to make our public schools *educate the whole child*, and not merely the expanded bulb at the upper end of him. Train him physically and emotionally as well as mentally. Substitute the playground, the garden, the shop for the book-school. Fit him for life and for action, instead of for contemplation and culture; for service instead of superiority; for work, not for display.